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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000290

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: EFCC CHAIR ARGUES FOR REPLACING "OLD GUARD"

REF: ABUJA 753

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (S) Summary: In an April 19 conversation with the Consul General, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chairman Ribadu (STRICTLY PROTECT) declared this election represented a contest between new reformist politicians and the old guard. Claiming electoral excesses were committed by all parties, he admitted the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had overreached in some states but was trying to correct this by relinquishing certain races to the opposition. He stated this process would be done quickly via electoral tribunals. He emphasized that the critiques of the international observer community, particularly the United States, would reverberate strongly and could help bring down the house if they were too critical of the process. End summary.

12. (S) In an April 19 conversation with the Consul General, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chairman Nuhu Ribadu argued Nigeria's elections represented a chance to replace the old guard with new, better leadership. Represented by Muhammadu Buhari, Vice President Atiku and Ibrahim Babangida this old guard held vast resources, controlled the media, and their tentacles reached far and deep, observed Ribadu. The old school would claw and fight to keep their exalted position; anyone who challenged them would have to do the same, asserted Ribadu. Thus, a free and fair election was unobtainable at Nigeria's current stage of political discourse. Anywhere it was possible, all parties, the PDP as well as the opposition, attempted to steer and pad the results in their favor, he maintained.

13. (S) This notwithstanding, Ribadu realized electoral misconduct and excesses were committed by the PDP in places the PDP should have left alone during the April 14 election. Much of the overreaching occurred in the Southwest. Because the Southwest is Obasanjo's home ground, the PDP had gone to great lengths to win it. However, the political reality was that the opposition, particularly the AC, was strong in many parts of this political zone. Spurred by its callous Vice

President for the zone, Olabode George, the PDP tried to sweep the gubernatorial races and to push INEC to declare it a completely PDP zone. Representing a more moderate view, Ribadu claimed to have argued against George's political rapine. Thus, he supported INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu validating the Action Congress (AC) victory in Lagos State, despite heavy pressure from President Obasanjo and George. Additionally, Ribadu was trying to push for a change in results through an expedited court process in Ondo, Edo, and Enugu.

¶4. (S) However, stressed Ribadu, President Obasanjo would not easily let go of some of these areas. In Edo State, PDP National Chairman of the Board of Trustees and long-time political hatchet-man Tony Anenih craved to remain the top political figure in the state. He could not do so if the PDP lost the gubernatorial spot. The President was loyal to Anenih and thus could not cast away Anenih's fortunes, Ribadu explained. Similarly, in Ondo State, the PDP was declared victorious even though initial results showed incumbent Olusegun Agagu trailing Labour Party (LP) candidate Olusegun Mimiko. Obasanjo has been a very strong supporter of Agagu and believed Agagu has performed well. He would hate to see Agagu ousted by Mimiko, a PDP turncoat.

¶5. (S) Because of the political ties Obasanjo has to many of these PDP candidates, the President felt he could not directly tell them to step aside. That would bruise his sense of loyalty, Ribadu opined. Instead, Ribadu and others have been talking to the President about the need to encourage the judiciary to handle a few of these electoral cases expeditiously. By doing so, the overall results would be a lot more equitable and help douse potential pockets of instability, particularly in the South.

¶6. (S) Ribadu was concerned about what the international

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community thought of the electoral process. Ribadu states that Nigerians were watching and waiting for the comments of international observers. In this vein, comments from the United States observers and government would be of special importance. Ribadu felt that the old guard was preparing to create confusion and spark disturbances in order to overturn the election and to keep their advantageous position in the political and economic life of the country. Instead of trumpeting democracy, harsh statements from the international community would only play into the hands of the political retrogrades, he asserted.

¶7. (S) If Nigeria could maintain its balance through the next few weeks, the country would see better educated, younger leadership, observed Ribadu. It was important for the election results to hold in order to continue the process of moving the old guard out of the way. Those who have been ruling Nigeria for the last thirty years have exhausted all the good they could do and have exhausted the country. They are the past. Those who were elected basically represent the future, concluded Ribadu.

¶8. (S) Comment: While Ribadu genuinely believes the election represents a battle between good and evil, this Manichean dichotomy is blurred to the point of sheer nonexistence in the sight of most impartial observers. However, he is correct in stating that all parties were guilty of electoral misappropriation, but none more guilty than the PDP. That said, should Ribadu be correct in stating that there will be a change in the electoral results in a few southern states, this would go far in dissipating pockets of potential unrest in the south and weakening the chorus of those calling for new elections. End comment.

¶9. (U) This cable was a joint effort by Embassy Abuja and ConGen Lagos.

BROWNE